

Department of Campus Ministry
Advocacy and Support Services

Annual Report 1991-92

This has been our first year operating within the structure of Advocacy and Support Services. The restructuring was intended to bring Student Services closer to student needs. We hope our report will indicate that we continue to work to that end. Student needs flow from their life experience in general, and their life as experienced as students within our University. A brief observation on that life experience is the grounds for our response to these needs.

The real world experience of students is strongly influenced by the economy. Many students try to maintain a job and studies at the same time. There is great concern about whether there is "life" after graduation. This makes their University experience stressful and intensely competitive for marks. Their approach to learning often seems to be to discern the answer that is expected with little critical reflection or sense of the broader issues involved. There is again additional stress for our students because of Quebec's political climate. Many perceive this as putting them in a still more precarious position. Questions such as "Will I have to leave the province", or "If I stay will I be able to find work" are frequently asked.

Another issue that is present, with certain ominous overtones, or undertones, is the environment and its effect on their lifestyles. Closely aligned to this is a subtle, and not so subtle, race and ethnic issue. This always arises more intensely in a tight economy and it is even more acute because of the political climate in Quebec.

These uncertainties have created intense cynicism vis-a-vis "the system". There is no longer an absolute faith in technology, in our economic system, in business, etc. This has created a vacuum that has had its positive side in that it has made students and the University aware of the need for the tools for making choices and value judgements, and is awakening awareness of the University's role in educating for moral development. While the credibility of Religious institutions continue to suffer there is an awakening of the need for spiritual and religious values as part of this renewed concern for moral consciousness. The threatening situation of ecological catastrophe, the economic depression, the constantly surfacing chaos and violence in our cities and families has made students aware of a deep malaise. This was recently expressed to me by a student in this way: "It seems evil, or chaos, is winning".

Campus Ministry has tried to deal with some of these issues in traditional, as well as in innovative ways. In the present context many of these issues arise on an ad hoc basis and are being dealt with in one-on-one situations, or in small groups. This accounts for a great deal of the time chaplains spend on campus. Presence and availability does not necessarily mean sitting expectantly in an office like some service station attendant, but it also includes wandering the halls of the University, and going to its events and gathering places.

I have recently calculated a rough estimate of my presence on campus from January 1992 to the present at 6.3 days a week and 3.75 evenings. The other University Chaplains could attest to similar times as witness to their presence on campus.

The programs and events that we offered, co-ordinated or co-operated in, are multiple and varied, as a quick perusal of the attached Appendix will indicate. I would like to highlight a few of these that will show the ways we have met the goals contained in the Advocacy and Student Services Mission Statements.

Our overall programming, as can be seen from Appendix A, is student centered; and we have attempted to work co-operatively with other Student Services units, as well as with faculty, staff and student groups.

One such example was the premiers of the films "Diplomatic Immunity" and "Maria's Story". The educating around social justice issues in Latin America was only part of the objective in these two events. A second objective was the co-operative links made with the Concordia Central America Committee, the Loyola Peace Institute, and the Social Justice Committee of Montreal. Through these kinds of events the work of these groups becomes better known amongst students. A third objective was the awareness raised concerning the reality and origins of many who have come to Concordia and Montreal, thus fostering better understanding in our community.

All our social programs have this perspective of opening up student experience to the multi-faceted context of the community at large. For example: Benedict Labre House meals, Prison Visits, Native Spirituality, Retreat on Homelessness, Parker Palmer's "The Violence of Our Knowledge" lecture, etc.

Student groups that have come to us for help, whether for space, or for co-operation or facilitation, etc. have done so because our profile is such that human concerns are paramount. The various groups meeting at Annex Z, or at Belmore House are such an example: e.g. Men's Group, Al Anon, Survivors of Incest, Muslim Worship, etc.

Our aim in individual counselling, in marriage preparation, in our worship services, memorial services, and groups such as the Inner Child workshops and Women's Spirituality is to encourage a new and more broadening perspective. The specific occasion becomes a time to not simply impart information, but the possibility of imparting moral awareness and development within the individual or group.

Our constituency is first of all students. We work with faculty and staff for the students. Students would form approximately 75% of those whom we serve. Our service also touches faculty and staff. These more generally in our various religious services in the Chapel, but also in other programs that bring together a wider mix of the University community: e.g. the Men's Group which is divided evenly between students, staff and faculty, and most notably The Spirit of Christmas Drive which involves a wide spectrum of our University community in a variety of ways. The Spirit of Christmas fundraising program raised \$8,700. This has enabled us to give out food vouchers to students in need. A significant number of the 100 or so recipients were single mothers. The marked increase in requests attests to the economic woes we are in.

Over the past year Matti Terho and I have been involved in some 30 weddings, each including a minimum of 6 marriage preparation meetings as well as the event itself. Other pastors, or part-time Chaplains have performed another 10 weddings. Our stipulation for these celebrations is that they be students, or connected with the University in some other way. For all the marriages one could count as many instances of marriage counselling vis-a-vis marriage difficulties. The twenty baptisms performed involved two meetings each, as well as the event itself. Memorial services were also facilitated or celebrated by us on about 10 occasions, half of which were in the Loyola Chapel.

As a closing thought, I would like to voice a concern that I believe hinders programming events which would create a forum for issues. This the fact that the University does not have any free time in its class schedule for these kinds of encounters. If this is deemed irreconcilable then perhaps place can be found in the University curriculum for such issues. If the University continues to have no room for these concerns, most students also will find it impossible because they too have no time in their busy schedules for these "luxuries".

Submitted by: Robert Nagy, Director of Campus Ministry.
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